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Meal Planning Made Easy

FOOD FOR YOUNG FAMILIES



■ Nutritionists in many countries have developed food-selection guides to help their people plan meals. Most guides reflect the cultural background of the people and their main foods. Such plans show there are many combinations of foods that provide an adequate diet. They also show that a food pattern which applies in one country may not be suitable for another country even though nutritional needs are similar.

Scientists on the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Research Council review the research on the better known nutrients and recommend the amounts needed daily for various ages. U.S. Department of Agriculture food scientists figured out which foods will furnish these nutrients and described them in a guide called *Food for Fitness*. This guide can help you plan meals for your family.

How To Plan

A good time to plan meals is when you are hungry. It saves time to get a pencil and some paper, and make a list of daily food needs. Suggested patterns for a good breakfast, lunch or supper, and dinner may help. Remember that meal planning is only a plan, not a binding contract. Make changes at the last minute if it will help you and the meal. Keep these things in mind:

1. Plan the meals for a day as a unit. Fit the needed foods into your meals each day whether you eat three meals a day or prefer to eat four or five times. If you eat snacks between meals, plan them along with the meals because they, too, count toward daily food needs. For efficient use of nutrients, select foods for each meal from several of the four

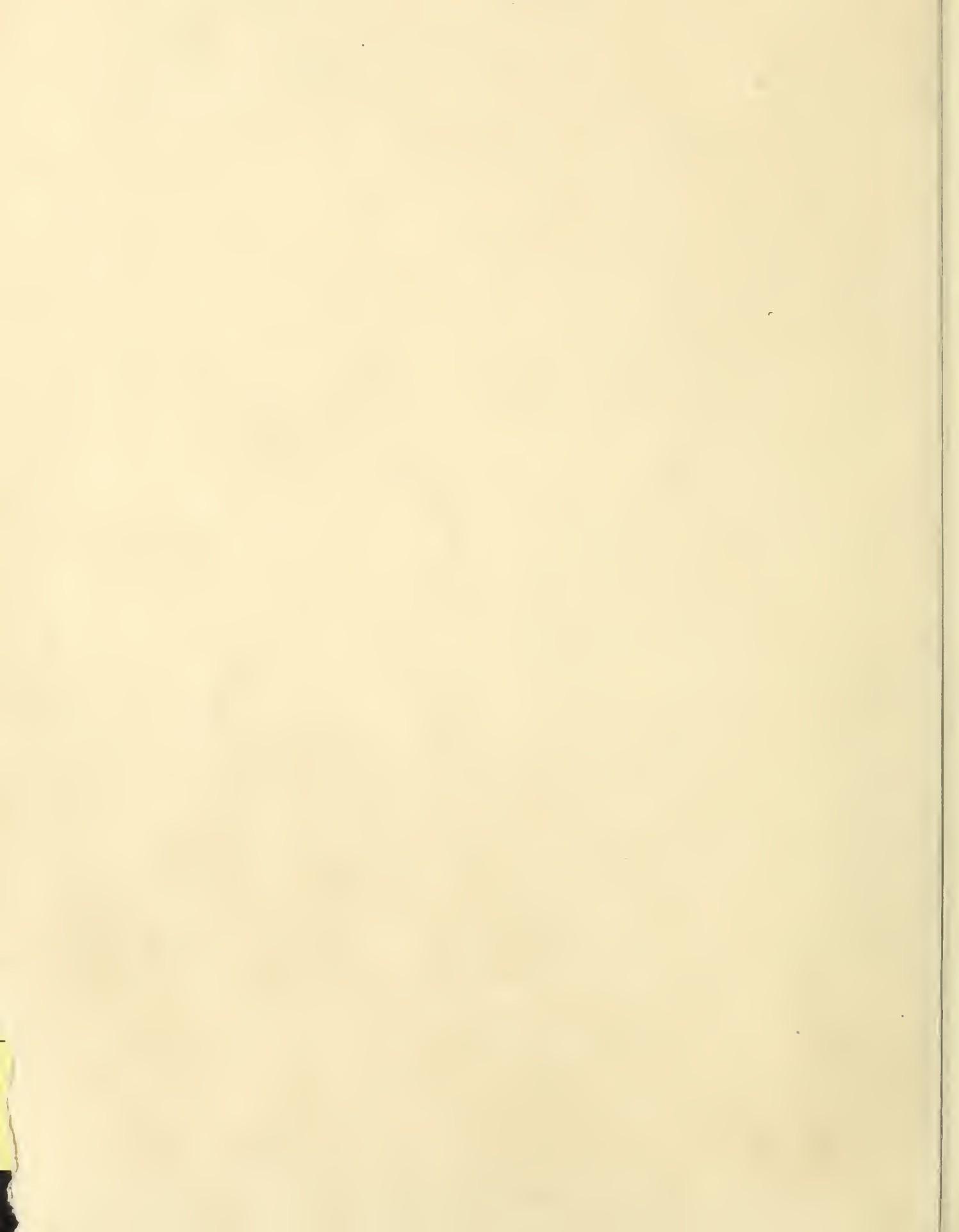
food groups. Try to include a protein food in each meal.

2. Plan meals for several days in advance. This may save time and money at the grocery store. It also may save time in preparing meals and can help prevent the nervous strain of having to decide at the last minute what to eat.

3. How much money do we have for food? The lower the food budget, the more important it is to spend time on careful planning and preparation of meals. Time and effort spent in making tasty, attractive dishes from low-cost foods can save you money and please the family. The cost of a meal is no indication of its nutritive value.

4. The age and activity of family members will determine the kind and amount of foods needed. Appetites, tastes, and tolerance for certain foods are different for the child, adult, and older member of the family. Teenagers and physically active adults need an amazing amount of food, but small children or sedentary adults can get along on surprisingly little. You can adapt regular family meals to the special needs of any family member by adjusting the size of servings or the way they are prepared.

5. Family and Dislikes. The smart meal planner not only will serve family favorites, but will introduce a new and different food occasionally. Prejudice against certain foods can often be overcome by serving them in different ways. Try every way you know to get the family to eat a wide variety of foods. Enjoying a wide variety of foods is a health, as well as a social, asset.





SIMPLE MEAL PATTERNS

Breakfast	Lunch or Supper	Dinner
Fruit or juice	Main dish	Main dish
Main dish	Vegetable or fruit	Two vegetables
Bread and/or cereal	Bread	Bread
Beverage	Beverage	Beverage
		Dessert

These patterns are only a guide to help you plan. You'll need to adjust them to suit your family. The daily food guide will also help you choose wisely the foods needed by your family. Check the foods in your meals with the daily food guide to be sure of your planning.

Breakfast

It is important to get one-fourth to one-third of the day's nutritional needs in breakfast. After a 12-hour fast, you can meet the day better if you eat a good breakfast.

Suggested Breakfast Pattern

FRUIT OR JUICE: A good source of vitamin C, such as fresh, frozen, or canned orange or grapefruit juice, tomato juice, cantaloupe, or strawberries.

MAIN DISH: A protein food such as eggs, meat, or cheese. Eggs and meat help to supply some of the iron as well as the protein needed. Some people prefer to get their breakfast protein in cereal and milk.

BREAD OR CEREAL: Whole grain or enriched cereal, or bread. Waffles, pancakes, or muffins—made with enriched flour—count as bread.

BEVERAGE: Milk or cocoa for children; milk, coffee, or tea for adults.

Lunch or Supper

Use a variety of foods for lunch or supper. This meal will differ depending upon where you eat it. Some combinations might include soup and sandwich, or sandwich and salad.

Suggested Lunch or Supper Pattern

MAIN DISH: *Soup* may be made with milk or vegetables, or both. *Sandwich:* Use whole grain or enriched bread. Use protein fillings like meat, poultry, fish, cheese, eggs, or peanut butter.

VEGETABLES OR FRUIT: Something crisp, such as raw vegetables, carrot sticks, green pepper wedges, and leaf lettuce, adds variety. Fresh fruit packs well in lunch box; canned or frozen fruit is good at home.

BREAD: Included in *sandwich* above.

BEVERAGE: Milk—a good time for adults to include at least one glass.

Dinner

Dinner is usually the largest meal of the day. If served in the evening, it can make up for things lacking during the day. And evening is the time when people relax and enjoy a pleasant time together. For older people or invalids, midday is often the best time for dinner because a heavy meal at night may interfere with sleep.



Suggested Dinner Menu

MAIN DISH: A protein food which includes meat, fish, poultry, eggs, or cheese. When dried beans or peas are your protein food, include some milk, cheese, or similar animal protein with them. Include liver and organ meats for variety.

VEGETABLES AND FRUITS: Serve a dark-green or deep yellow vegetable every other day. Some raw vegetables or fruits for salad will add a pleasing texture to the meal. Fresh, canned, or frozen fruit can be served as either salad or dessert. Potatoes are usually well liked and contribute good amounts of several nutrients. Other vegetables, such as corn, green beans, and peas, add extra nutrients.

BREAD: Use a variety of whole grain or enriched breads or rolls.

BEVERAGE: Milk for children—adults may prefer tea or coffee.

DESSERT: Simple puddings, custards, and fruits are good desserts. More elaborate desserts may be used for those who need extra calories and on special occasions.

Snacks

Snacks are a part of the day's food supply. To supplement the foods eaten at meals, keep on hand milk, cheese, ice cream, sandwich fillings, vegetables, fruit, and fruit juice. Why waste money on snacks which have little food value and lots of calories?

Do Your Meals Measure Up?

Find the needs of your family and check with the daily food guide to insure that your meals have all the basic foods. Have you included enough from each food group? Variety adds interest to meals. Good meals have variety in:

- **Food value**—For good balance distribute the high-protein and starchy foods among the different foods. Wide variety helps keep your daily meals well balanced.
- **Flavor**—Bring out contrasts by using a strong flavor with a mild one, a sweet with a sour. Avoid using the same food twice in a meal.
- **Color**—A red slice of tomato, a sprig of dark greens, or any bright colored food on a plate makes a whole meal look and taste better.
- **Texture**—A combination of smooth, crisp, and chewy foods gives variety in texture to a meal.
- **Shape**—Add interest to the way food looks on a plate by having some served in mounds, others in round slices or strips.
- **Temperature**—Even on a hot day, one hot dish served along with cold foods makes the meal more satisfying.

References

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